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great, indeed only, objection to its use has been the large quantity of water which it takes to dissolve a small part of the flowers, and which must be taken with it into the stomach. It requires a quarter of a pint of boiling water to dissolve the soluble portion of one drachm of Camomile Flowers; and, when one or even two ounces may be taken with advantage, it must at once be seen how impossible it is to take a proper dose of this wholesome herb in the form of tea; and the only reason why it has not long since been placed the very first in rank of all restorative medicines is, that in taking it the stomach has always been loaded with water, which tends in a great measure to counteract, and very frequently wholly to destroy the effect. It must be evident that loading a weak stomach with a large quantity of water, merely for the purpose of conveying into it a small quantity of medicine must be injurious; and that the medicine must possess powerful renovating properties only to counteract the bad effects likely to be produced by the water. Generally speaking, this has been the case with Camomile Flowers, a herb possessing the highest restorative qualities, and when properly taken, decidedly the most speedy restorer, and the most certain preserver of health.

NORTON'S CAMOMILE PILLS are prepared by a peculiar process, accidentally discovered, and known only to the proprietor, and which he firmly believes to be one of the most valuable modern discoveries in medicine, by which all the essential and extractive matter of more than an ounce of the flowers is concentrated in four moderate-sized pills. Experience has afforded the most ample proof that they possess all the fine aromatic and stomachic properties for which the herb has been esteemed; and, as they are taken into the stomach unencumbered by any diluting or indigestible substance, in the same degree has their benefit been more immediate and decided. Mild in their operation and pleasant in their effect, they may be taken at any age, and under any circumstance, without danger or inconvenience. A person exposed to cold and wet a whole day or night could not possibly receive any injury from taking them, but, on the contrary, they would effectually prevent a cold being taken. • After a long acquaintance with and strict observance of the medicinal properties of *Norton's Camomile Pills*, it is only doing

them justice to say, that they are most valuable of all Tonic Medicines. The word tonic is meant a medicine which gives strength to the stomach and aids digestion in proper quantities all food, which increases the power of the nerve and muscle of the human system. In other words, invigorates the muscular systems. The solidity of the whole tissue of the body quickly follows the use of *Norton's Camomile Pills*, their certain and speedy effect in pairing the partial dilapidations of intemperance, and their lasting influence on the whole frame, is convincing, that in the smallest community contained the largest quantity of the principle, of so peculiar a nature as to affect the whole system, through which health and strength sufficient to prevent the formation of disease, and also to constitute a constitution against contagion; a general use is strongly recommended as preventative during the prevalence of the malarious fever or other infectious diseases to persons attending sick rooms. It is as valuable, as in no one instance has failed in preventing the taking of cold, even under the most trying circumstances.

As *Norton's Camomile Pills* are particularly recommended for all stomach complaints or indigestion, it will be expected that some advice should be given respecting diet, though after all that has been written upon the subject, after thousands of volumes upon volume, after hundreds of medical essays on diet, as a means of prolonging life, it would be unnecessary to say that we did not feel it our duty to attempt the humble endeavour of inducing persons to regard them not, but to adopt a regimen which is dictated by nature, and approved by common sense. Those persons who are of the wholesomes, and are governed by the opinion of writers on diet, and who are both unhealthy in body and weak in mind. There can be no doubt that the pills are signed to inform us what is proper for the stomach, and of course that nature instructs us what food to take and what to avoid: we want no other advice. The pills can be more clear than that that nature intended for our food and whether liquid or solid, foreign

on: if they are pure and unadulterated, no harm need be dreaded by their use; they will only injure by abuse. Consequently, whatever the palate approves, eat of it always in moderation, but never to excess; keeping in mind that the first of digestion is performed in the mouth, the second in the stomach; and that, if the stomach may be able to do its duty properly, it is requisite the first should be well performed; this consists in masticating or chewing the solid food, as to break down and separate the small substances of meat and vegetables, mixing them well, and blending them together before they are swallowed; and particularly urged upon all to take sufficient time to their meals and never eat in haste.

If you conform to this short and yet comprehensive advice, and find there are various things which others cannot drink with pleasure and without inconvenience, and which would be pleasant to yourself only that they disagree, you may conclude that the fault is in the food, that it does not possess the power which it ought to do, that it wants assistance, and the sooner that assistance is afforded the better. A very short trial of this medicine will best prove how soon it will put the stomach in a condition to perform all the work which nature intends. By its use you will soon be able to eat, in moderation, whatever is agreeable to the taste, and unable to name one inarticulate article of food which disagrees with the stomach. Never eat a small meal well digested affords nourishment to the system than a large quantity of the same food, when digested indistinctly. Let the dish be ever so delicious, so enticing a variety offered, the more so enchanting, never forget that nature tends to preserve health, and health is the soul of enjoyment. But an impropriety be at any time, or ever committed, by which the stomach is overloaded or disordered, render it unable to aid by taking a dose of *Norton's*

Camomile Pills, which will so promptly assist in carrying off the burden thus imposed upon it that all will soon be right again.

It is most certainly true that every person in his lifetime consumes a quantity of noxious matter, which if taken at one meal would be fatal: it is these small quantities of noxious matter, which are introduced into our food, either by accident or wilful adulteration, which we find so often upset the stomach, and not unfrequently lay the foundation of illness, and perhaps final ruination to health. To preserve the constitution, it should be our constant care, if possible, to counteract the effect of these small quantities of unwholesome matter; and whenever, in that way, an enemy to the constitution finds its way into the stomach, a friend should be immediately sent after it, which would prevent its mischievous effects, and expel it altogether; no better friend can be found, nor one which will perform the task with greater certainty than **NORTON'S CAMOMILE PILLS**. And let it be observed that the longer this medicine is taken the less it will be wanted; it can in no case become habitual, as its entire action is to give energy and force to the stomach, which is the spring of life, the source from which the whole frame draws its succour and support. After an excess of eating or drinking, and upon every occasion of the general health being at all disturbed, these PILLS should be immediately taken, as they will stop and eradicate disease at its commencement. Indeed, it is most confidently asserted, that by the timely use of this medicine only, and a common degree of caution, any person may enjoy all the comforts within his reach, may pass through life without an illness, and with the certainty of attaining a healthy OLD AGE.

On account of their volatile properties, they must be kept in bottles; and if closely corked their qualities are neither impaired by time nor injured by any change of climate whatever. Price, 13½d. and 2s. 9d. each, with full directions. The large bottle contains the quantity of three small ones, or PILLS equal to fourteen ounces of CAMOMILE FLOWERS.

Sold by nearly all respectable Medicine Vendors.

Be particular to ask for "**NORTON'S PILLS**," and do not be persuaded to purchase an imitation.

A CLEAR COMPLEXION!!!
GODFREY'S

EXTRACT OF ELDER FLOWER

Is strongly recommended for Softening, Improving, Beautifying and Preserving the SKIN, and giving it a blooming charming appearance. It will completely remove Tan, burn, Redness, &c., and by its Balsamic and Healing qualities render the skin soft, pliable, and free from dryness, &c.; it from every humour, pimple, or eruption; and by continuing its use only a short time, the skin will become and continue soft and smooth, and the complexion perfectly clear and beautiful.

Sold in Bottles, price 2s. 9d., by all Medicine Vendors and Perfumers.

FOR GOUT, RHEUMATISM AND RHEUMATIC GOUT.

SIMCO'S GOUT AND RHEUMATIC PILLS

are a certain and safe remedy. They restore tranquillity to the nerves, give tone to the stomach, and strength to the whole system. No other medicine can be compared to these excellent Pills, as they prevent the disorder from attacking the stomach or head, and restore thousands from pain and misery to health and comfort.

Sold by all Medicine Vendors, at 1s. 1½d. or 2s. 9d. per box.

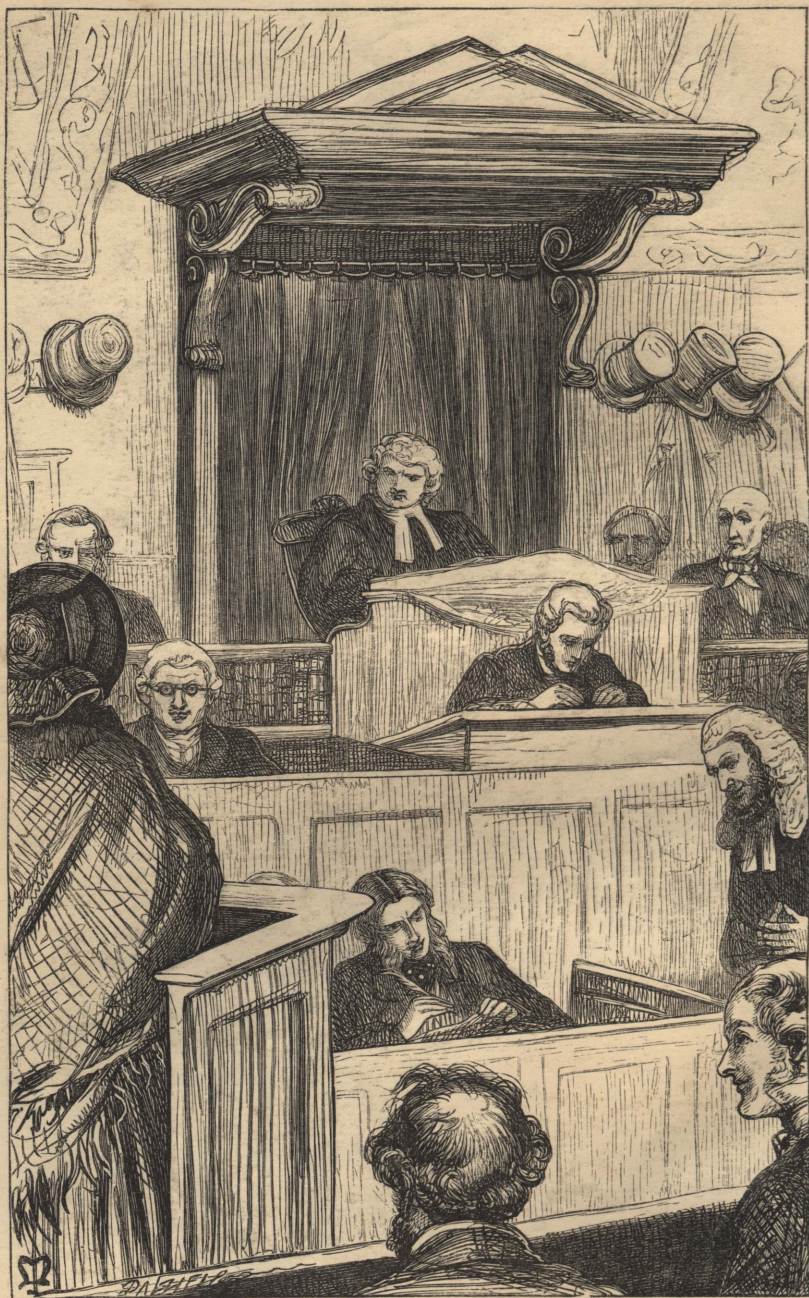
INFLUENZA, COUGHS, AND COLDS

SIMCO'S ESSENCE OF LINSEED

is the most efficacious remedy ever discovered for the relief of persons suffering from Influenza; the first two doses generally arrest the progress of this distressing complaint, and a little perseverance completely removes it. Children's Coughs, as well as Coughs in Adults, will be removed by a few doses (frequently by the first); and Asthmatic persons, who previously had not been able to lie down in bed, have received the benefit from the use of

SIMCO'S ESSENCE OF LINSEED.

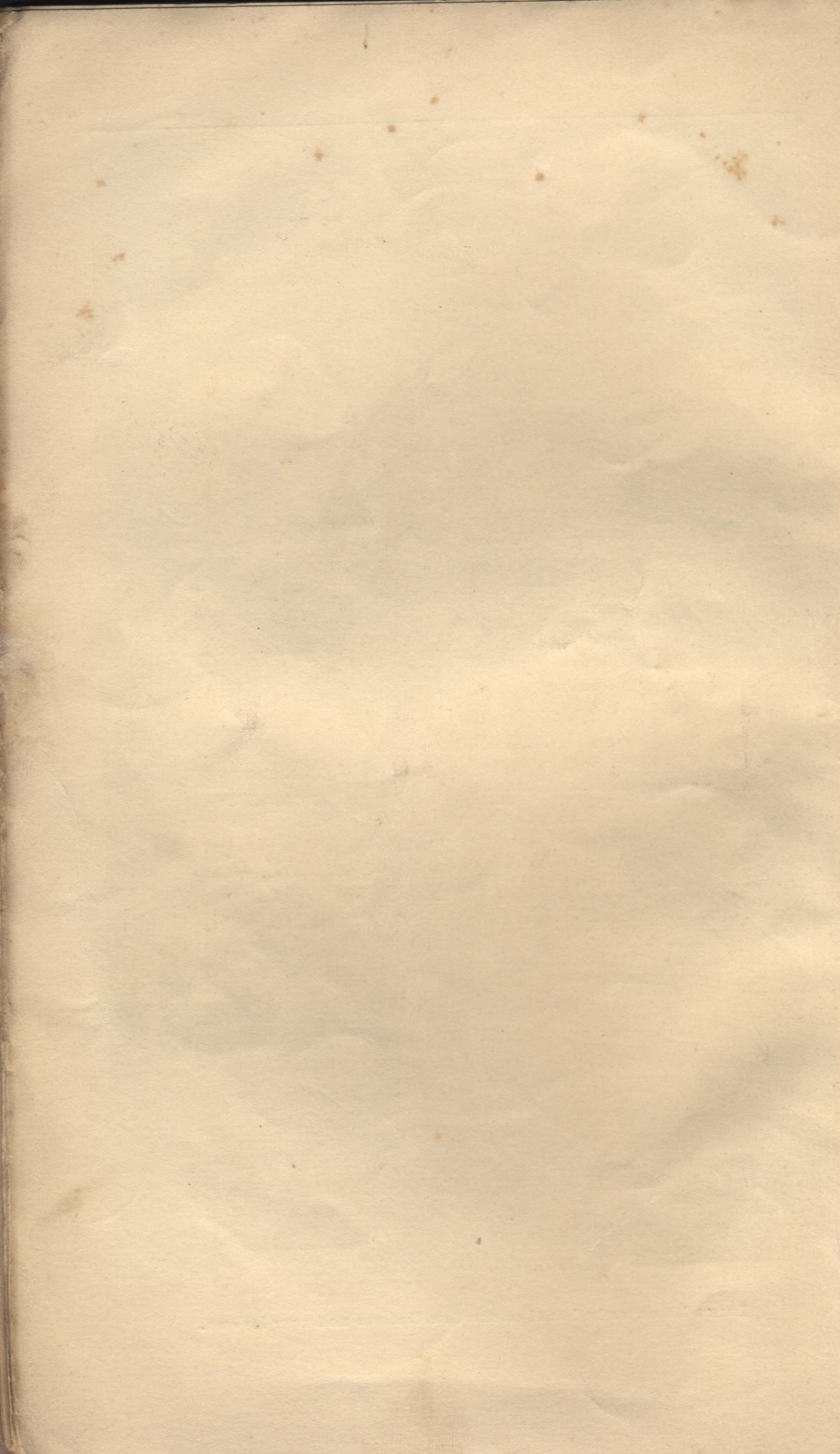
Sold in Bottles at 1s. 1½d., and 2s. 9d. each.



Bridget Bolster in Court.



Lucius Mason, as he leaned on the Gate that was no longer his own.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

MRS. ORME TELLS THE STORY.

It was late when that second day's work was over, and when Mrs. Orme and Lady Mason again found themselves in the Hamworth carriage. They had sat in court from ten in the morning till past seven, with a short interval of a few minutes in the middle of the day, and were weary to the very soul when they left it. Lucius again led out his mother, and as he did so he expressed to her in strong language his approval of Mr. Furnival's speech. At last some one had spoken out on his mother's behalf in that tone which should have been used from the first. He had been very angry with Mr. Furnival, thinking that the barrister had lost sight of his mother's honour, and that he was playing with her happiness. But now he was inclined to forgive him. Now at last the truth had been spoken in eloquent words, and the persecutors of his mother had been addressed in language such as it was fitting that they should hear. To him the last two hours had been two hours of triumph, and as he passed through the hall of the court he whispered in his mother's ear that now, at last, as he hoped, her troubles were at an end.

And another whisper had been spoken as they passed through that hall. Mrs. Orme went out leaning on the arm of her son, but on the other side of her was Mr. Aram. He had remained in his seat till they had begun to move, and then he followed them. Mrs. Orme was already half way across the court when he made his way up to her side and very gently touched her arm.

'Sir?' said she, looking round.

'Do not let her be too sure,' he said. 'Do not let her be over confident. All that may go for nothing with a jury.' Then he lifted his hat and left her.

All that go for nothing with a jury! She hardly understood this, but yet she felt that it all should go for nothing if right were done. Her mind was not argumentative, nor yet perhaps was her sense of true justice very acute. When Sir Peregrine had once hinted that it would be well that the criminal should be pronounced guilty, because in truth she had been guilty, Mrs. Orme by no means agreed with him. But now, having heard how those wretched witnesses had been denounced, knowing how true had been the words they had spoken, knowing how false were those assurances of innocence with which Mr. Furnival had been so fluent, she felt

something of that spirit which had actuated Sir Peregrine, and had almost thought that justice demanded a verdict against her friend.

‘Do not let her be over-confident,’ Mr. Aram had said. But in truth Mrs. Orme, as she had listened to Mr. Furnival’s speech, had become almost confident that Lady Mason would be acquitted. It had seemed to her impossible that any jury should pronounce her to be guilty after that speech. The state of her mind as she listened to it had been very painful. Lady Mason’s hand had rested in her own during a great portion of it; and it would have been natural that she should give some encouragement to her companion by a touch, by a slight pressure, as the warm words of praise fell from the lawyer’s mouth. But how could she do so, knowing that the praise was false? It was not possible to her to show her friendship by congratulating her friend on the success of a lie. Lady Mason also had, no doubt, felt this, for after a while her hand had been withdrawn, and they had both listened in silence, giving no signs to each other as to their feelings on the subject.

But as they sat together in the carriage Lucius did give vent to his feelings. ‘I cannot understand why all that should not have been said before, and said in a manner to have been as convincing as it was to-day.’

‘I suppose there was no opportunity before the trial,’ said Mrs. Orme, feeling that she must say something, but feeling also how impossible it was to speak on the subject with any truth in the presence both of Lady Mason and her son.

‘But an occasion should have been made,’ said Lucius. ‘It is monstrous that my mother should have been subjected to this accusation for months and that no one till now should have spoken out to show how impossible it is that she should have been guilty.’

‘Ah! Lucius, you do not understand,’ said his mother.

‘And I hope I never may,’ said he. ‘Why did not the jury get up in their seats at once and pronounce their verdict when Mr. Furnival’s speech was over? Why should they wait there, giving another day of prolonged trouble, knowing as they must do what their verdict will be? To me all this is incomprehensible, seeing that no good can in any way come from it.’

And so he went on, striving to urge his companions to speak upon a subject which to them did not admit of speech in his presence. It was very painful to them, for in addressing Mrs. Orme he almost demanded from her some expression of triumph. ‘You at least have believed in her innocence,’ he said at last, ‘and have not been ashamed to show that you did so.’

‘Lucius,’ said his mother, ‘we are very weary; do not speak to us now. Let us rest till we are at home.’ Then they closed their eyes and there was silence till the carriage drove up to the door of Orley Farm House.

The two ladies immediately went up-stairs, but Lucius, with more cheerfulness about him than he had shown for months past, remained below to give orders for their supper. It had been a joy to him to hear Joseph Mason and Dockwrath exposed, and to listen to those words which had so clearly told the truth as to his mother's history. All that torrent of indignant eloquence had been to him an enumeration of the simple facts,—of the facts as he knew them to be,—of the facts as they would now be made plain to all the world. At last the day had come when the cloud would be blown away. He, looking down from the height of his superior intellect on the folly of those below him, had been indignant at the great delay ;—but that he would now forgive.

They had not been long in the house, perhaps about fifteen minutes, when Mrs. Orme returned down stairs and gently entered the dining-room. He was still there, standing with his back to the fire and thinking over the work of the day.

‘Your mother will not come down this evening, Mr. Mason.’

‘Not come down?’

‘No; she is very tired,—very tired indeed. I fear you hardly know how much she has gone through.’

‘Shall I go to her?’ said Lucius.

‘No, Mr. Mason, do not do that. I will return to her now. And—but;—in a few minutes, Mr. Mason, I will come back to you again, for I shall have something to say to you.’

‘You will have tea here?’

‘I don't know. I think not. When I have spoken to you I will go back to your mother. I came down now in order that you might not wait for us.’ And then she left the room and again went up-stairs. It annoyed him that his mother should thus keep away from him, but still he did not think that there was any special reason for it. Mrs. Orme's manner had been strange; but then everything around them in these days was strange, and it did not occur to him that Mrs. Orme would have ought to say in her promised interview which would bring to him any new cause for sorrow.

Lady Mason, when Mrs. Orme returned to her, was sitting exactly in the position in which she had been left. Her bonnet was off and was lying by her side, and she was seated in a large arm-chair, again holding both her hands to the sides of her head. No attempt had been made to smooth her hair or to remove the dust and soil which had come from the day's long sitting in the court. She was a woman very careful in her toilet, and scrupulously nice in all that touched her person. But now all that had been neglected, and her whole appearance was haggard and dishevelled.

‘You have not told him?’ she said.

‘No; I have not told him yet; but I have bidden him expect me. He knows that I am coming to him.’

‘And how did he look?’

‘I did not see his face.’ And then there was silence between them for a few minutes, during which Mrs. Orme stood at the back of Lady Mason’s chair with her hand on Lady Mason’s shoulder. ‘Shall I go now, dear?’ said Mrs. Orme.

‘No; stay a moment; not yet. Oh, Mrs. Orme!’

‘You will find that you will be stronger and better able to bear it when it has been done.’

‘Stronger! Why should I wish to be stronger? How will he bear it?’

‘It will be a blow to him, of course.’

‘It will strike him to the ground, Mrs. Orme. I shall have murdered him. I do not think that he will live when he knows that he is so disgraced.’

‘He is a man, and will bear it as a man should do. Shall I do anything for you before I go?’

‘Stay a moment. Why must it be to-night?’

‘He must not be in the court to-morrow. And what difference will one day make? He must know it when the property is given up.’

Then there was a knock at the door, and a girl entered with a decanter, two wine-glasses, and a slice or two of bread and butter. ‘You must drink that,’ said Mrs. Orme, pouring out a glass of wine.

‘And you?’

‘Yes, I will take some too. There. I shall be stronger now. Nay, Lady Mason, you shall drink it. And now if you will take my advice you will go to bed.’

‘You will come to me again?’

‘Yes; directly it is over. Of course I shall come to you. Am I not to stay here all night?’

‘But him;—I will not see him. He is not to come.’

‘That will be as he pleases.’

‘No. You promised that. I cannot see him when he knows what I have done for him.’

‘Not to hear him say that he forgives you?’

‘He will not forgive me. You do not know him. Could you bear to look at your boy if you had disgraced him for ever?’

‘Whatever I might have done he would not desert me. Nor will Lucius desert you. Shall I go now?’

‘Ah, me! Would that I were in my grave!’

Then Mrs. Orme bent over her and kissed her, pressed both her hands, then kissed her again, and silently creeping out of the room made her way once more slowly down the stairs.

Mrs. Orme, as will have been seen, was sufficiently anxious to perform the task which she had given herself, but yet her heart

sank within her as she descended to the parlour. It was indeed a terrible commission, and her readiness to undertake it had come not from any feeling on her own part that she was fit for the work and could do it without difficulty, but from the eagerness with which she had persuaded Lady Mason that the thing must be done by some one. And now who else could do it? In Sir Peregrine's present state it would have been a cruelty to ask him; and then his feelings towards Lucius in the matter were not tender as were those of Mrs. Orme. She had been obliged to promise that she herself would do it, or otherwise she could not have urged the doing. And now the time had come. Immediately on their return to the house Mrs. Orme had declared that the story should be told at once; and then Lady Mason, sinking into the chair from which she had not since risen, had at length agreed that it should be so. The time had now come, and Mrs. Orme, whose footsteps down the stairs had not been audible, stood for a moment with the handle of the door in her hand.

Had it been possible she also would now have put it off till the morrow,—would have put it off till any other time than that which was then present. All manner of thoughts crowded on her during those few seconds. In what way should she do it? What words should she use? How should she begin? She was to tell this young man that his mother had committed a crime of the very blackest dye, and now she felt that she should have prepared herself and resolved in what fashion this should be done. Might it not be well, she asked herself for one moment, that she should take the night to think of it and then see him in the morning? The idea, however, only lasted her for a moment, and then, fearing lest she might allow herself to be seduced into some weakness, she turned the handle and entered the room.

He was still standing with his back to the fire, leaning against the mantelpiece, and thinking over the occurrences of the day that was past. His strongest feeling now was one of hatred to Joseph Mason,—of hatred mixed with thorough contempt. What must men say of him after such a struggle on his part to ruin the fame of a lady and to steal the patrimony of a brother! 'Is she still determined not to come down?' he said as soon as he saw Mrs. Orme.

'No; she will not come down to-night, Mr. Mason. I have something that I must tell you.'

'What! is she ill? Has it been too much for her?'

'Mr. Mason,' she said, 'I hardly know how to do what I have undertaken.' And he could see that she actually trembled as she spoke to him.

'What is it, Mrs. Orme? Is it anything about the property? I think you need hardly be afraid of me. I believe I may say I could bear anything of that kind.'

‘And how did he look?’

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‘Mr. Mason——’ And then again she stopped herself. How was she to speak this horrible word?

‘Is it anything about the trial?’ He was now beginning to be frightened, feeling that something terrible was coming; but still of the absolute truth he had no suspicion.

‘Oh! Mr. Mason, if it were possible that I could spare you I would do so. If there were any escape,—any way in which it might be avoided.’

‘What is it?’ said he. And now his voice was hoarse and low, for a feeling of fear had come upon him. ‘I am a man and can bear it, whatever it is.’

‘You must be a man then, for it is very terrible. Mr. Mason, that will, you know——’

‘You mean the codicil?’

‘The will that gave you the property——’

‘Yes.’

‘It was not done by your father.’

‘Who says so?’

‘It is too sure. It was not done by him,—nor by them,—those other people who were in the court to-day.’

‘But who says so? How is it known? If my father did not sign it, it is a forgery; and who forged it? Those wretches have bought over some one and you have been deceived, Mrs. Orme. It is not of the property I am thinking, but of my mother. If it were as you say, my mother must have known it?’

‘Ah! yes.’

‘And you mean that she did know it; that she knew it was a forgery?’

‘Oh! Mr. Mason.’

‘Heaven and earth! Let me go to her. If she were to tell me so herself I would not believe it of her. Ah! she has told you?’

‘Yes; she has told me.’

‘Then she is mad. This has been too much for her, and her brain has gone with it. Let me go to her, Mrs. Orme.’

‘No, no; you must not go her.’ And Mrs. Orme put herself directly before the door. ‘She is not mad,—not now. Then, at that time, we must think she was so. It is not so now.’

‘I cannot understand you.’ And he put his left hand up to his forehead as though to steady his thoughts. ‘I do not understand you: If the will be a forgery, who did it?’

This question she could not answer at the moment. She was still standing against the door, and her eyes fell to the ground. ‘Who did it?’ he repeated. ‘Whose hand wrote my father’s name?’

‘You must be merciful, Mr. Mason.’

‘Merciful;—to whom?’

‘To your mother.’

‘Merciful to my mother! Mrs. Orme, speak out to me. If the will was forged, who forged it? You cannot mean to tell me that she did it!’

She did not answer him at the moment in words, but coming close up to him she took both his hands in hers, and then looked steadfastly up into his eyes. His face had now become almost convulsed with emotion, and his brow was very black. ‘Do you wish me to believe that my mother forged the will herself?’ Then again he paused, but she said nothing. ‘Woman, it’s a lie,’ he exclaimed; and then tearing his hands from her, shaking her off, and striding away with quick footsteps, he threw himself on a sofa that stood in the furthest part of the room.

She paused for a moment and then followed him very gently. She followed him and stood over him in silence for a moment, as he lay with his face from her. ‘Mr. Mason,’ she said at last, ‘you told me that you would bear this like a man.’

But he made her no answer, and she went on. ‘Mr. Mason, it is, as I tell you. Years and years ago, when you were a baby, and when she thought that your father was unjust to you—for your sake,—to remedy that injustice, she did this thing.’

‘What; forged his name! It must be a lie. Though an angel came to tell me so, it would be a lie! What; my mother!’ And now he turned round and faced her, still however lying on the sofa.

‘It is true, Mr. Mason. Oh, how I wish that it were not! But you must forgive her. It is years ago, and she has repented of it, Sir Peregrine has forgiven her,—and I have done so.’

And then she told him the whole story. She told him why the marriage had been broken off, and described to him the manner in which the truth had been made known to Sir Peregrine. It need hardly be said, that in doing so, she dealt as softly as was possible with his mother’s name; but yet she told him everything. ‘She wrote it herself, in the night.’

‘What all; all the names herself?’

‘Yes, all.’

‘Mrs. Orme it cannot be so. I will not believe it. To me it is impossible. That you believe it I do not doubt, but I cannot. Let me go to her. I will go to her myself. But even should she say so herself, I will not believe it.’

But she would not let him go up-stairs even though he attempted to move her from the door, almost with violence. ‘No; not till you say that you will forgive her and be gentle with her. And it must not be to-night. We will be up early in the morning, and you can see her before we go;—if you will be gentle to her.’

He still persisted that he did not believe the story, but it became clear to her, by degrees, that the meaning of it all had at last sunk into his mind, and that he did believe it. Over and over

again she told him all that she knew, explaining to him what his mother had suffered, making him perceive why she had removed herself out of his hands, and had leant on others for advice. And she told him also that though they still hoped that the jury might acquit her, the property must be abandoned.

‘I will leave the house this night if you wish it,’ he said.

‘When it is all over, when she has been acquitted and shall have gone away, then let it be done. Mr. Mason, you will go with her; will you not?’ and then again there was a pause.

‘Mrs. Orme, it is impossible that I should say now what I may do. It seems to me as though I could not live through it. I do not believe it. I cannot believe it.’

As soon as she had exacted a promise from him that he would not go to his mother, at any rate without further notice, she herself went up stairs and found Lady Mason lying on her bed. At first Mrs. Orme thought that she was asleep, but no such comfort had come to the poor woman. ‘Does he know it?’ she asked.

Mrs. Orme’s task for that night was by no means yet done. After remaining for a while with Lady Mason she again returned to Lucius, and was in this way a bearer of messages between them. There was at last no question as to doubting the story. He did believe it. He could not avoid the necessity for such belief. ‘Yes,’ he said, when Mrs. Orme spoke again of his leaving the place, ‘I will go and hide myself; and as for her——’

‘But you will go with her,—if the jury do not say that she was guilty——’

‘Oh, Mrs. Orme!’

‘If they do, you will come back for her, when the time of her punishment is over? She is still your mother, Mr. Mason.’

At last the work of the night was done, and the two ladies went to their beds. The understanding was that Lucius should see his mother before they started in the morning, but that he should not again accompany them to the court. Mrs. Orme’s great object had been,—her great object as regarded the present moment,—to prevent his presence in court when the verdict should be given. In this she had succeeded. She could now wish for an acquittal with a clear conscience; and could as it were absolve the sinner within her own heart, seeing that there was no longer any doubt as to the giving up of the property. Whatever might be the verdict of the jury Joseph Mason of Groby would, without doubt, obtain the property which belonged to him.

‘Good-night, Mr. Mason,’ Mrs. Orme said at last, as she gave him her hand.

‘Good-night. I believe that in my madness I spoke to you to-night like a brute.’

‘No, no. It was nothing. I did not think of it.’

‘When you think of how it was with me, you will forgive me.’

She pressed his hand and again told him that she had not thought of it. It was nothing. And indeed it had been as nothing to her. There may be moments in a man’s life when any words may be forgiven, even though they be spoken to a woman.

When Mrs. Orme was gone, he stood for a while perfectly motionless in the dining-room, and then coming out into the hall he opened the front door, and taking his hat, went out into the night. It was still winter, but the night, though cold and very dark, was fine, and the air was sharp with the beginning frost. Leaving the door open he walked forth, and passing out on to the road went down from thence to the gate. It had been his constant practice to walk up and down from his own hall door to his own gate on the high road, perhaps comforting himself too warmly with the reflection that the ground on which he walked was all his own. He had no such comfort now, as he made his way down the accustomed path and leaned upon the gate, thinking over what he had heard.

A forger! At some such hour as this, with patient premeditated care, she had gone to work and committed one of the vilest crimes known to man. And this was his mother! And he, he, Lucius Mason, had been living for years on the fruit of this villainy;—had been so living till this terrible day of retribution had come upon him! I fear that at that moment he thought more of his own misery than he did of hers, and hardly considered, as he surely should have done, that mother’s love which had led to all this guilt. And for a moment he resolved that he would not go back to the house. His head, he said to himself, should never again rest under a roof which belonged of right to Joseph Mason. He had injured Joseph Mason;—had injured him innocently, indeed, as far as he himself was concerned; but he had injured him greatly, and therefore now hated him all the more. ‘He shall have it instantly,’ he said, and walked forth into the high road as though he would not allow his feet to rest again on his brother’s property.

But he was forced to remember that this could not be so. His mother’s trial was not yet over, and even in the midst of his own personal trouble he remembered that the verdict to her was still a matter of terrible import. He would not let it be known that he had abandoned the property, at any rate till that verdict had been given. And then as he moved back to the house he tried to think in what way it would become him to behave to his mother. ‘She can never be my mother again,’ he said to himself. They were terrible words;—but then was not his position very terrible?

And when at last he had bolted the front door, going through the accustomed task mechanically, and had gone up stairs to his own room, he had failed to make up his mind on this subject. Perhaps it would be better that he should not see her. What could he say

to her? What word of comfort could he speak? It was not only that she had beggared him! Nay; it was not that at all! But she had doomed him to a life of disgrace which no effort of his own could wipe away. And then as he threw himself on his bed he thought of Sophia Furnival. Would she share his disgrace with him? Was it possible that there might be solace there?

Quite impossible, we should say, who know her well.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

YOUNG LOCHINVAR.

JUDGE STAVELEY, whose court had not been kept sitting to a late hour by any such eloquence as that of Mr. Furnival, had gone home before the business of the other court had closed. Augustus, who was his father's marshal, remained for his friend, and had made his way in among the crowd, so as to hear the end of the speech.

'Don't wait dinner for us,' he had said to his father. 'If you do you will be hating us all the time; and we sha'n't be there till between eight and nine.'

'I should be sorry to hate you,' said the judge, 'and so I won't.' When therefore Felix Graham escaped from the court at about half-past seven, the two young men were able to take their own time and eat their dinner together comfortably, enjoying their bottle of champagne between them perhaps more thoroughly than they would have done had the judge and Mrs. Staveley shared it with them.

But Felix had something of which to think besides the champagne—something which was of more consequence to him even than the trial in which he was engaged. Madeline had promised that she would meet him that evening;—or rather had not so promised. When asked to do so she had not refused, but even while not refusing had reminded him that her mother would be there. Her manner to him had, he thought, been cold, though she had not been ungracious. Upon the whole, he could not make up his mind to expect success. 'Then he must have been a fool!' the reader learned in such matters will say. The reader learned in such matters is, I think, right. In that respect he was a fool.

'I suppose we must give the governor the benefit of our company over his wine,' said Augustus, as soon as their dinner was over.

'I suppose we ought to do so.'

'And why not? Is there any objection?'

'To tell the truth,' said Graham, 'I have an appointment which I am very anxious to keep.'

'An appointment? Where? Here at Noningsby, do you mean?'

‘In this house. But yet I cannot say that it is absolutely an appointment. I am going to ask your sister what my fate is to be.’

‘And that is the appointment! Very well, my dear fellow; and may God prosper you. If you can convince the governor that it is all right, I shall make no objection. I wish, for Madeline’s sake, that you had not such a terrible bee in your bonnet.’

‘And you will go to the judge alone?’

‘Oh, yes. I’ll tell him——. What shall I tell him?’

‘The truth, if you will. Good-bye, old fellow. You will not see me again to-night, nor yet to-morrow in this house, unless I am more fortunate than I have any right to hope to be.’

‘Faint heart never won fair lady, you know,’ said Augustus.

‘My heart is faint enough then; but nevertheless I shall say what I have got to say.’ And then he got up from the table.

‘If you don’t come down to us,’ said Augustus, ‘I shall come up to you. But may God speed you. And now I’ll go to the governor.’

Felix made his way from the small breakfast-parlour in which they had dined across the hall into the drawing-room, and there he found Lady Staveley alone. ‘So the trial is not over yet, Mr. Graham?’ she said.

‘No; there will be another day of it.’

‘And what will be the verdict? Is it possible that she really forged the will?’

‘Ah! that I cannot say. You know that I am one of her counsel, Lady Staveley?’

‘Yes; I should have remembered that, and been more discreet. If you are looking for Madeline, Mr. Graham, I think that she is in the library.’

‘Oh! thank you;—in the library.’ And then Felix got himself out of the drawing-room into the hall again not in the most graceful manner. He might have gone direct from the drawing-room to the library, but this he did not remember. It was very odd, he thought, that Lady Staveley, of whose dislike to him he had felt sure, should have thus sent him direct to her daughter, and have become a party, as it were, to an appointment between them. But he had not much time to think of this before he found himself in the room. There, sure enough, was Madeline waiting to listen to his story. She was seated when he entered, with her back to him; but as she heard him she rose, and, after pausing for a moment, she stepped forward to meet him.

‘You and Augustus were very late to-day,’ she said.

‘Yes. I was kept there, and he was good enough to wait for me.’

‘You said you wanted to——speak to me,’ she said, hesitating a little, but yet very little; ‘to speak to me alone; and so mamma said I had better come in here. I hope you are not vexed that I should have told her.’

‘Certainly not, Miss Staveley.’

‘Because I have no secrets from mamma.’

‘Nor do I wish that anything should be secret. I hate all secrets. Miss Staveley, your father knows of my intention.’

On this point Madeline did not feel it to be necessary to say anything. Of course her father knew of the intention. Had she not received her father’s sanction for listening to Mr. Graham she would not have been alone with him in the library. It might be that the time would come in which she would explain all this to her lover, but that time had not come yet. So when he spoke of her father she remained silent, and allowing her eyes to fall to the ground she stood before him, waiting to hear his question.

‘Miss Staveley,’ he said;—and he was conscious himself of being very awkward. Much more so, indeed, than there was any need, for Madeline was not aware that he was awkward. In her eyes he was quite master of the occasion, and seemed to have everything his own way. He had already done all that was difficult in the matter, and had done it without any awkwardness. He had already made himself master of her heart, and it was only necessary now that he should enter in and take possession. The ripe fruit had fallen, as Miss Furnival had once chosen to express it, and there he was to pick it up,—if only he considered it worth his trouble to do so. That manner of the picking would not signify much, as Madeline thought. That he desired to take it into his garner and preserve it for his life’s use was everything to her, but the method of his words at the present moment was not much. He was her lord and master. He was the one man who had conquered and taken possession of her spirit; and as to his being awkward, there was not much in that. Nor do I say that he was awkward. He spoke his mind in honest, plain terms, and I do not know he could have done better.

‘Miss Staveley,’ he said, ‘in asking you to see me alone, I have made a great venture. I am indeed risking all that I most value.’ And then he paused, as though he expected that she would speak. But she still kept her eyes upon the ground, and still stood silent before him. ‘I cannot but think you must guess my purpose,’ he said, ‘though I acknowledge that I have had nothing that can warrant me in hoping for a favourable answer. There is my hand; if you can take it you need not doubt that you have my heart with it.’ And then he held out to her his broad, right hand.

Madeline still stood silent before him and still fixed her eyes upon the ground, but very slowly she raised her little hand and allowed her soft slight fingers to rest upon his open palm. It was as though she thus affixed her legal signature and seal to the deed of gift. She had not said a word to him; not a word of love or a word of assent; but no such word was now necessary.

‘Madeline, my own Madeline,’ he said; and then taking unfair

advantage of the fingers which she had given him he drew her to his breast and folded her in his arms.

It was nearly an hour after this when he returned to the drawing-room. 'Do go in now,' she said. 'You must not wait any longer; indeed you must go.'

'And you——; you will come in presently.'

'It is already nearly eleven. No, I will not show myself again to-night. Mamma will soon come up to me, I know. Good-night, Felix. Do you go now, and I will follow you.' And then after some further little ceremony he left her.

When he entered the drawing-room Lady Staveley was there, and the judge with his teacup beside him, and Augustus standing with his back to the fire. Felix walked up to the circle, and taking a chair sat down, but at the moment said nothing.

'You didn't get any wine after your day's toil, Master Graham,' said the judge.

'Indeed I did, sir. We had some champagne.'

'Champagne, had you? Then I ought to have waited for my guest, for I got none. You had a long day of it in court.'

'Yes, indeed, sir.'

'And I am afraid not very satisfactory.' To this Graham made no immediate answer, but he could not refrain from thinking that the day, taken altogether, had been satisfactory to him.

And then Baker came into the room, and going close up to Lady Staveley, whispered something in her ear. 'Oh, ah, yes,' said Lady Staveley. 'I must wish you good night, Mr. Graham.' And she took his hand, pressing it very warmly. But though she wished him good night then, she saw him again before he went to bed. It was a family in which all home affairs were very dear, and a new son could not be welcomed into it without much expression of affection.

'Well, sir! and how have you sped since dinner?' the judge asked as soon as the door was closed behind his wife.

'I have proposed to your daughter and she has accepted me.' And as he said so he rose from the chair in which had just now seated himself.

'Then, my boy, I hope you will make her a good husband;' and the judge gave him his hand.

'I will try to do so. I cannot but feel, however, how little right I had to ask her, seeing that I am likely to be so poor a man.'

'Well, well, well—we will talk of that another time. At present we will only sing your triumphs—'

'So faithful in love, and so dauntless in war,
There never was knight like the young Lochinvar.'

'Felix, my dear fellow, I congratulate you with all my heart,' said Augustus. 'But I did not know you were good as a warrior.'

‘Ah, but he is though,’ said the judge. ‘What do you think of his wounds? And if all that I hear be true, he has other battles on hand. But we must not speak about that till this poor lady’s trial is over.’

‘I need hardly tell you, sir,’ said Graham, with that sheep-like air which a man always carries on such occasions, ‘that I regard myself as the most fortunate man in the world.’

‘Quite unnecessary,’ said the judge. ‘On such occasions that is taken as a matter of course.’ And then the conversation between them for the next ten minutes was rather dull and flat.

Up-stairs the same thing was going on, in a manner somewhat more animated, between the mother and daughter,—for ladies on such occasions can be more animated than men.

‘Oh, mamma, you must love him,’ Madeline said.

‘Yes, my dear; of course I shall love him now. Your papa says that he is very clever.’

‘I know papa likes him. I knew that from the very first. I think that was the reason why——’

‘And I suppose clever people are the best,—that is to say, if they are good.’

‘And isn’t he good?’

‘Well—I hope so. Indeed, I’m sure he is. Mr. Orme was a very good young man too;—but it’s no good talking about him now.’

‘Mamma, that never could have come to pass.’

‘Very well, my dear. It’s over now, and of course all that I looked for was your happiness.’

‘I know that, mamma; and indeed I am very happy. I’m sure I could not ever have liked any once else since I first knew him.’

Lady Staveley still thought it very odd, but she had nothing else to say. As regarded the pecuniary considerations of the affair she left them altogether to her husband, feeling that in this way she could relieve herself from misgivings which might otherwise make her unhappy. ‘And after all I don’t know that his ugliness signifies,’ she said to herself. And so she made up her mind that she would be loving and affectionate to him, and sat up till she heard his footsteps in the passage, in order that she might speak to him, and make him welcome to the privileges of a son-in-law.

‘Mr. Graham,’ she said, opening her door as he passed by.

‘Of course she has told you,’ said Felix.

‘Oh yes, she has told me. We don’t have many secrets in this house. And I’m sure I congratulate you with all my heart; and I think you have got the very best girl in all the world. Of course I’m her mother; but I declare, if I was to talk of her for a week, I could not say anything of her but good.’

‘I know how fortunate I am.’

‘Yes, you are fortunate. For there is nothing in the world equal

to a loving wife who will do her duty. And I'm sure you'll be good to her.'

'I will endeavour to be so.'

'A man must be very bad indeed who would be bad to her,—and I don't think that of you. And it's a great thing, Mr. Graham, that Madeline should have loved a man of whom her papa is so fond. I don't know what you have done to the judge, I'm sure.' This she said, remembering in the innocence of her heart that Mr. Arbuthnot had been a son-in-law rather after her own choice, and that the judge always declared that his eldest daughter's husband had seldom much to say for himself.

'And I hope that Madeline's mother will receive me as kindly as Madeline's father,' said he, taking Lady Staveley's hand and pressing it.

'Indeed I will. I will love you very dearly if you will let me. My girls' husbands are the same to me as sons.' Then she put up her face and he kissed it, and so they wished each other good night.

He found Augustus in his own room, and they two had hardly sat themselves down over the fire, intending to recall the former scenes which had taken place in that very room, when a knock was heard at the door, and Mrs. Baker entered.

'And so it's all settled, Mr. Felix,' said she.

'Yes,' said he; 'all settled.'

'Well now! didn't I know it from the first?'

'Then what a wicked old woman you were not to tell,' said Augustus.

'That's all very well, Master Augustus. How would you like me to tell of you;—for I could, you know?'

'You wicked old woman, you couldn't do anything of the kind.'

'Oh, couldn't I? But I defy all the world to say a word of Miss Madeline but what's good,—only I did know all along which way the wind was blowing. Lord love you, Mr. Graham, when you came in here all of a smash like, I knew it wasn't for nothing.'

'You think he did it on purpose then,' said Staveley.

'Did it on purpose? What; make up to Miss Madeline? Why, of course he did it on purpose. He's been a-thinking of it ever since Christmas night, when I saw you, Master Augustus, and a certain young lady when you came out into the dark passage together.'

'That's a downright falsehood, Mrs. Baker.'

'Oh—very well. Perhaps I was mistaken. But now, Mr. Graham, if you don't treat our Miss Madeline well——'

'That's just what I've been telling him,' said her brother. 'If he uses her ill, as he did his former wife—breaks her heart as he did with that one——'

'His former wife!' said Mrs. Baker.

‘Haven’t you heard of that? Why, he’s had two already.’

‘Two wives already! Oh now, Master Augustus, what an old fool I am ever to believe a word that comes out of your mouth.’ Then having uttered her blessing, and having had her hand cordially grasped by this new scion of the Staveley family, the old woman left the young men to themselves, and went to her bed.

‘Now that it is done——,’ said Felix.

‘You wish it were undone.’

‘No, by heaven! I think I may venture to say that it will never come to me to wish that. But now that it is done, I am astonished at my own impudence almost as much as at my success. Why should your father have welcomed me to his house as his son-in-law, seeing how poor are my prospects?’

‘Just for that reason; and because he is so different from other men. I have no doubt that he is proud of Madeline for having liked a man with an ugly face and no money.’

‘If I had been beautiful like you, I shouldn’t have had a chance with him.’

‘Not if you’d been weighted with money also. Now, as for myself, I confess I’m not nearly so magnanimous as my father, and, for Mad’s sake, I do hope you will get rid of your vagaries. An income, I know, is a very commonplace sort of thing; but when a man has a family there are comforts attached to it.’

‘I am at any rate willing to work,’ said Graham somewhat moodily.

‘Yes, if you may work exactly in your own way. But men in the world can’t do that. A man, as I take it, must through life allow himself to be governed by the united wisdom of others around him. He cannot take upon himself to judge as to every step by his own lights. If he does, he will be dead before he has made up his mind as to the preliminaries.’ And in this way Augustus Staveley from the depth of his life’s experience spoke words of worldly wisdom to his future brother-in-law.

On the next morning before he started again for Alston and his now odious work, Graham succeeded in getting Madeline to himself for five minutes. ‘I saw both your father and mother last night,’ said he, ‘and I shall never forget their goodness to me.’

‘Yes, they are good.’

‘It seems like a dream to me that they should have accepted me as their son-in-law.’

‘But it is no dream to me, Felix;—or if so, I do not mean to wake any more. I used to think that I should never care very much for anybody out of my own family;—but now——’ And she then pressed her little hand upon his arm.

‘And Felix,’ she said, as he prepared to leave her, ‘you are not to go away from Noningsby when the trial is over. I wanted mamma to tell you, but she said I’d better do it.’

CHAPTER XXXV

THE LAST DAY.

MRS. ORME was up very early on that last morning of the trial, and had dressed herself before Lady Mason was awake. It was now March, but yet the morning light was hardly sufficient for her as she went through her toilet. They had been told to be in the court very punctually at ten, and in order to do so they must leave Orley Farm at nine. Before that, as had been arranged over night, Lucius was to see his mother.

'You haven't told him! he doesn't know!' were the first words which Lady Mason spoke as she raised her head from the pillow. But then she remembered. 'Ah! yes,' she said, as she again sank back and hid her face, 'he knows it all now.'

'Yes, dear; he knows it all; and is it not better so? He will come and see you, and when that is over you will be more comfortable than you have been for years past.'

Lucius also had been up early, and when he learned that Mrs. Orme was dressed, he sent up to her begging that he might see her. Mrs. Orme at once went to him, and found him seated at the breakfast-table with his head resting on his arm. His face was pale and haggard, and his hair was uncombed. He had not been undressed that night, and his clothes hung on him as they always do hang on a man who has passed a sleepless night in them. To Mrs. Orme's inquiry after himself he answered not a word, nor did he at first ask after his mother. 'That was all true that you told me last night?'

'Yes, Mr. Mason; it was true.'

'And she and I must be outcasts for ever. I will endeavour to bear it, Mrs. Orme. As I did not put an end to my life last night I suppose that I shall live and bear it. Does she expect to see me?'

'I told her that you would come to her this morning.'

'And what shall I say? I would not condemn my own mother; but how can I not condemn her?'

'Tell her at once that you will forgive her.'

'But it will be a lie. I have not forgiven her. I loved my mother and esteemed her as a pure and excellent woman. I was proud of my mother. How can I forgive her for having destroyed such feelings as those?'

‘There should be nothing that a son would not forgive his mother.’

‘Ah! that is so easily spoken. Men talk of forgiveness when their anger rankles deepest in their hearts. In the course of years I shall forgive her. I hope I shall. But to say that I can forgive her now would be a farce. She has broken my heart, Mrs. Orme.’

‘And has not she suffered herself? Is not her heart broken?’

‘I have been thinking of that all night. I cannot understand how she should have lived for the last six months. Well; is it time that I should go to her?’

Mrs. Orme again went up stairs, and after another interval of half an hour returned to fetch him. She almost regretted that she had undertaken to bring them together on that morning, thinking that it might have been better to postpone the interview till the trial should be over. She had expected that Lucius would have been softer in his manner. But it was too late for any such thought.

‘You will find her dressed now, Mr. Mason,’ said she; ‘but I conjure you, as you hope for mercy yourself, to be merciful to her. She is your mother, and though she has injured you by her folly, her heart has been true to you through it all. Go now, and remember that harshness to any woman is unmanly.’

‘I can only act as I think best,’ he replied in that low stern voice which was habitual to him; and then with slow steps he went up to his mother’s room.

When he entered it she was standing with her eyes fixed upon the door and her hands clasped together. So she stood till he had closed the door behind him, and had taken a few steps on towards the centre of the room. Then she rushed forward, and throwing herself on the ground before him clasped him round the knees with her arms. ‘My boy, my boy!’ she said. And then she lay there bathing his feet with her tears.

‘Oh! mother, what is this that she has told me?’

But Lady Mason at the moment spoke no further words. It seemed as though her heart would have burst with sobs, and when for a moment she lifted up her face to his, the tears were streaming down her cheeks. Had it not been for that relief she could not have borne the sufferings which were heaped upon her.

‘Mother, get up,’ he said. ‘Let me raise you. It is dreadful that you should lie there. Mother, let me lift you.’ But she still clung to his knees, grovelling on the ground before him. ‘Lucius, Lucius,’ she said, and she then sank away from him as though the strength of her muscles would no longer allow her to cling to him. She sank away from him and lay along the ground hiding her face upon the floor.

‘Mother,’ he said, taking her gently by the arm as he knelt at her side, ‘if you will rise I will speak to you.’

'Your words will kill me,' she said. 'I do not dare to look at you. Oh! Lucius, will you ever forgive me?'

And yet she had done it all for him. She had done a rascally deed, an hideous cut-throat deed, but it had been done altogether for him. No thought of her own aggrandisement had touched her mind when she resolved upon that forgery. As Rebekah had deceived her lord and robbed Esau, the first-born, of his birthright, so had she robbed him who was as Esau to her. How often had she thought of that, while her conscience was pleading hard against her! Had it been imputed as a crime to Rebekah that she had loved her own son well, and loving him had put a crown upon his head by means of her matchless guile? Did she love Lucius, her babe, less than Rebekah had loved Jacob? And had she not striven with the old man, struggling that she might do this just thing without injustice, till in his anger he had thrust her from him. 'I will not break my promise for the brat,' the old man had said;—and then she did the deed. But all that was as nothing now. She felt no comfort now from that Bible story which had given her such encouragement before the thing was finished. Now the result of evil-doing had come full home to her, and she was seeking pardon with a broken heart, while burning tears furrowed her cheeks,—not from him whom she had thought to injure, but from the child of her own bosom, for whose prosperity she had been so anxious.

Then she slowly arose and allowed him to place her upon the sofa. 'Mother,' he said, 'it is all over here.'

'Ah! yes.'

'Whither we had better go, I cannot yet say,—or when. We must wait till this day is ended.'

'Lucius, I care nothing for myself,—nothing. It is nothing to me whether or no they say that I am guilty. It is of you only that I am thinking.'

'Our lot, mother, must still be together. If they find you guilty you will be imprisoned, and then I will go, and come back when they release you. For you and me the future world will be very different from the past.'

'It need not be so,—for you, Lucius. I do not wish to keep you near me now.'

'But I shall be near you. Where you hide your shame there will I hide mine. In this world there is nothing left for us. But there is another world before you,—if you can repent of your sin.' This too he said very sternly, standing somewhat away from her, and frowning the while with those gloomy eyebrows. Sad as was her condition he might have given her solace, could he have taken her by the hand and kissed her. Peregrine Orme would have done so, or Augustus Staveley, could it have been possible that they should have found themselves in that position. Though Lucius

Mason could not do so, he was not less just than they, and, it may be, not less loving in his heart. He could devote himself for his mother's sake as absolutely as could they. But to some is given and to some is denied that cruse of heavenly balm with which all wounds can be assuaged and sore hearts ever relieved of some portion of their sorrow. Of all the virtues with which man can endow himself surely none other is so odious as that justice which can teach itself to look down upon mercy almost as a vice!

'I will not ask you to forgive me,' she said, plaintively.

'Mother,' he answered, 'were I to say that I forgave you my words would be a mockery. I have no right either to condemn or to forgive. I accept my position as it has been made for me, and will endeavour to do my duty.'

It would have been almost better for her that he should have upbraided her for her wickedness. She would then have fallen again prostrate before him, if not in body at least in spirit, and her weakness would have stood for her in the place of strength. But now it was necessary that she should hear his words and bear his looks,—bear them like a heavy burden on her back without absolutely sinking. It had been that necessity of bearing and never absolutely sinking which, during years past, had so tried and tested the strength of her heart and soul. Seeing that she had not sunk, we may say that her strength had been very wonderful.

And then she stood up and came close to him. 'But you will give me your hand, Lucius?'

'Yes, mother; there is my hand. I shall stand by you through it all.' But he did not offer to kiss her; and there was still some pride in her heart which would not allow her to ask him for an embrace.

'And now,' he said, 'it is time that you should prepare to go. Mrs. Orme thinks it better that I should not accompany you.'

'No, Lucius, no; you must not hear them proclaim my guilt in court.'

'That would make but little difference. But nevertheless I will not go. Had I known this before I should not have gone there. It was to testify my belief in your innocence; nay, my conviction——'

'Oh, Lucius, spare me!'

'Well, I will speak of it no more. I shall be here to-night when you come back.'

'But if they say that I am guilty they will take me away.'

'If so I will come to you,—in the morning if they will let me. But, mother, in any case I must leave this house to-morrow.' Then again he gave her his hand, but he left her without touching her with his lips.

When the two ladies appeared in court together without Lucius Mason there was much question among the crowd as to the cause of

his absence. Both Dockwrath and Joseph Mason looked at it in the right light, and accepted it as a ground for renewed hope. 'He dare not face the verdict,' said Dockwrath. And yet when they had left the court on the preceding evening, after listening to Mr. Furnival's speech, their hopes had not been very high. Dockwrath had not admitted with words that he feared defeat, but when Mason had gnashed his teeth as he walked up and down his room at Alston, and striking the table with his clenched fist had declared his fears, 'By heavens they will escape me again!' Dockwrath had not been able to give him substantial comfort. 'The jury are not such fools as to take all that for gospel,' he had said. But he had not said it with that tone of assured conviction which he had always used till Mr. Furnival's speech had been made. There could have been no greater attestation to the power displayed by Mr. Furnival than Mr. Mason's countenance as he left the court on that evening. 'I suppose it will cost me hundreds of pounds,' he said to Dockwrath that evening. 'Orley Farm will pay for it all,' Dockwrath had answered; but his answer had shown no confidence. And, if we think well of it, Joseph Mason was deserving of pity. He wanted only what was his own; and that Orley Farm ought to be his own he had no smallest doubt. Mr. Furnival had not in the least shaken him; but he had made him feel that others would be shaken. 'If it could only be left to the judge,' thought Mr. Mason to himself. And then he began to consider whether this British palladium of an unanimous jury had not in it more of evil than of good.

Young Peregrine Orme again met his mother at the door of the court, and at her instance gave his arm to Lady Mason. Mr. Aram was also there; but Mr. Aram had great tact, and did not offer his arm to Mrs. Orme, contenting himself with making a way for her and walking beside her. 'I am glad that her son has not come to-day,' he said, not bringing his head suspiciously close to hers, but still speaking so that none but she might hear him. 'He has done all the good that he could do, and as there is only the judge's charge to hear, the jury will not notice his absence. Of course we hope for the best, Mrs. Orme, but it is doubtful.'

As Felix Graham took his place next to Chaffanbrass, the old lawyer scowled at him, turning his red old savage eyes first on him and then from him, growling the while, so that the whole court might notice it. The legal portion of the court did notice it and were much amused. 'Good morning, Mr. Chaffanbrass,' said Graham quite aloud as he took his seat; and then Chaffanbrass growled again. Considering the lights with which he had been lightened, there was a species of honesty about Mr. Chaffanbrass which certainly deserved praise. He was always true to the man whose money he had taken, and gave to his customer, with all the power at his command, that assistance which he had professed to

sell. But we may give the same praise to the hired bravo who goes through with truth and courage the task which he has undertaken. I knew an assassin in Ireland who professed that during twelve years of practice in Tipperary he had never failed when he had once engaged himself. For truth and honesty to their customers—which are great virtues—I would bracket that man and Mr. Chaffanbrass together.

And then the judge commenced his charge, and as he went on with it he repeated all the evidence that was in any way of moment, pulling the details to pieces, and dividing that which bore upon the subject from that which did not. This he did with infinite talent and with a perspicuity beyond all praise. But to my thinking it was remarkable that he seemed to regard the witnesses as a dissecting surgeon may be supposed to regard the subjects on which he operates for the advancement of science. With exquisite care he displayed what each had said and how the special saying of one bore on that special saying of another. But he never spoke of them as though they had been live men and women who were themselves as much entitled to justice at his hands as either the prosecutor in this matter or she who was being prosecuted; who, indeed, if anything, were better entitled unless he could show that they were false and suborned; for unless they were suborned or false they were there doing a painful duty to the public, for which they were to receive no pay and from which they were to obtain no benefit. Of whom else in that court could so much be said? The judge there had his ermine and his canopy, his large salary and his seat of honour. And the lawyers had their wigs, and their own loud voices, and their places of precedence. The attorneys had their seats and their big tables, and the somewhat familiar respect of the tipstaves. The jury, though not much to be envied, were addressed with respect and flattery, had their honourable seats, and were invariably at least called gentlemen. But why should there be no seat of honour for the witnesses? To stand in a box, to be hawled after by the police, to be scowled at and scolded by the judge, to be browbeaten and accused falsely by the barristers, and then to be condemned as perjurers by the jury,—that is the fate of the one person who during the whole trial is perhaps entitled to the greatest respect, and is certainly entitled to the most public gratitude. Let the witness have a big arm-chair, and a canopy over him, and a man behind him with a red cloak to do him honour and keep the flies off; let him be gently invited to come forward from some inner room where he can sit before a fire. Then he will be able to speak out, making himself heard without scolding, and will perhaps be able to make a fair fight with the cocks who can crow so loudly on their own dunghills.

The judge in this case did his work with admirable skill, blowing

aside the froth of Mr. Furnival's eloquence, and upsetting the sophistry and false deductions of Mr. Chaffanbrass. The case for the jury, as he said, hung altogether upon the evidence of Kenneby and the woman Bolster. As far as he could see, the evidence of Dockwrath had little to do with it; and alleged malice and greed on the part of Dockwrath could have nothing to do with it. The jury might take it as proved that Lady Mason at the former trial had sworn that she had been present when her husband signed the codicil and had seen the different signatures affixed to it. They might also take it as proved, that that other deed—the deed purporting to close a partnership between Sir Joseph Mason and Mr. Martock,—had been executed on the 14th of July, and that it had been signed by Sir Joseph, and also by those two surviving witnesses, Kenneby and Bolster. The question, therefore, for the consideration of the jury had narrowed itself to this: had two deeds been executed by Sir Joseph Mason, both bearing the same date? If this had not been done, and if that deed with reference to the partnership were a true deed, then must the other be false and fraudulent; and if false and fraudulent, then must Lady Mason have sworn falsely, and been guilty of that perjury with which she was now charged. There might, perhaps, be one loophole to this argument by which an escape was possible. Though both deeds bore the date of 14th July, there might have been error in this. It was possible, though no doubt singular, that that date should have been inserted in the partnership deed, and the deed itself be executed afterwards. But then the woman Bolster told them that she had been called to act as witness but once in her life, and if they believed her in that statement, the possibility of error as to the date would be of little or no avail on behalf of Lady Mason. For himself, he could not say that adequate ground had been shown for charging Bolster with swearing falsely. No doubt she had been obstinate in her method of giving her testimony, but that might have arisen from an honest resolution on her part not to allow herself to be shaken. The value of her testimony must, however, be judged by the jury themselves. As regarded Kenneby, he must say that the man had been very stupid. No one who had heard him would accuse him for a moment of having intended to swear falsely, but the jury might perhaps think that the testimony of such a man could not be taken as having much value with reference to circumstances which happened more than twenty years since.

The charge took over two hours, but the substance of it has been stated. Then the jury retired to consider their verdict, and the judge, and the barristers, and some other jury proceeded to the business of some other and less important trial. Lady Mason and Mrs. Orme sat for a while in their seats—perhaps for a space of twenty minutes—and then, as the jury did not at once return into

court, they retired to the sitting-room in which they had first been placed. Here Mr. Aram accompanied them, and here they were of course met by Peregrine Orme.

‘His lordship’s charge was very good—very good, indeed,’ said Mr. Aram.

‘Was it?’ asked Peregrine.

‘And very much in our favour,’ continued the attorney.

‘You think then,’ said Mrs. Orme, looking up into his face, ‘you think that——’ But she did not know how to go on with her question.

‘Yes, I do. I think we shall have a verdict; I do, indeed. I would not say so before Lady Mason if my opinion was not very strong. The jury may disagree. That is not improbable. But I cannot anticipate that the verdict will be against us.’

There was some comfort in this; but how wretched was the nature of the comfort! Did not the attorney, in every word which he spoke, declare his own conviction of his client’s guilt. Even Peregrine Orme could not say out boldly that he felt sure of an acquittal because no other verdict could be justly given. And then why was not Mr. Furnival there, taking his friend by the hand and congratulating her that her troubles were so nearly over? Mr. Furnival at this time did not come near her; and had he done so, what could he have said to her?

He and Sir Richard Leatherham left the court together, and the latter went at once back to London without waiting to hear the verdict. Mr. Chaffanbrass also, and Felix Graham retired from the scene of their labours, and as they did so, a few words were spoken between them.

‘Mr. Graham,’ said the ancient hero of the Old Bailey, ‘you are too great for this kind of work I take it. If I were you, I would keep out of it for the future.’

‘I am very much of the same way of thinking, Mr. Chaffanbrass,’ said the other.

‘If a man undertakes a duty, he should do it. That’s my opinion, though I confess it’s a little old fashioned; especially if he takes money for it, Mr. Graham.’ And then the old man glowered at him with his fierce eyes, and nodded his head and went on. What could Graham say to him? His answer would have been ready enough had there been time or place in which to give it. But he had no answer ready which was fit for the crowded hall of the court-house, and so Mr. Chaffanbrass went on his way. He will now pass out of our sight, and we will say of him, that he did his duty well according to his lights.

There, in that little room, sat Lady Mason and Mrs. Orme till late in the evening, and there, with them, remained Peregrine. Some sort of refreshment was procured for them, but of the three

days they passed in the court, that, perhaps, was the most oppressive. There was no employment for them, and then the suspense was terrible! That suspense became worse and worse as the hours went on, for it was clear that at any rate some of the jury were anxious to give a verdict against her. 'They say that there's eight and four,' said Mr. Aram, at one of the many visits which he made to them; 'but there's no saying how true that may be.'

'Eight and four!' said Peregrine.

'Eight to acquit, and four for guilty,' said Aram. 'If so, we're safe, at any rate, till the next assizes.'

But it was not fated that Lady Mason should be sent away from the court in doubt. At eight o'clock Mr. Aram came to them, hot with haste, and told them that the jury had sent for the judge. The judge had gone home to his dinner, but would return to court at once when he heard that the jury had agreed.

'And must we go into court again?' said Mrs. Orme.

'Lady Mason must do so.'

'Then of course I shall go with her. Are you ready now, dear?'

Lady Mason was unable to speak, but she signified that she was ready, and then they went into court. The jury were already in the box, and as the two ladies took their seats, the judge entered. But few of the gas-lights were lit, so that they in the court could hardly see each other, and the remaining ceremony did not take five minutes.

'Not guilty, my lord,' said the foreman. Then the verdict was recorded, and the judge went back to his dinner. Joseph Mason and Dockwrath were present and heard the verdict. I will leave the reader to imagine with what an appetite they returned to their chamber.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

I LOVE HER STILL.

It was all over now, and as Lucius had said to his mother, there was nothing left for them but to go and hide themselves. The verdict had reached him before his mother's return, and on the moment of his hearing it he sat down and commenced the following letter to Mr. Furnival:—

'Orley Farm, March —, 18—.

* DEAR SIR,

'I beg to thank you, in my mother's name, for your great exertions in the late trial. I must acknowledge that I have been wrong in thinking that you gave her bad advice, and am now convinced that you acted with the best judgment on her behalf. May I

beg that you will add to your great kindness by inducing the gentlemen who undertook the management of the case as my mother's attorneys to let me know as soon as possible in what sum I am indebted to them?

'I believe I need trouble you with no preamble as to my reasons when I tell you that I have resolved to abandon immediately any title that I may have to the possession of Orley Farm, and to make over the property at once, in any way that may be most efficacious, to my half-brother, Mr. Joseph Mason, of Groby Park. I so strongly feel the necessity of doing this at once, without even a day's delay, that I shall take my mother to lodgings in London to-morrow, and shall then decide on what steps it may be best that we shall take. My mother will be in possession of about 200*l.* a year, subject to such deduction as the cost of the trial may make from it.

'I hope that you will not think that I intrude upon you too far when I ask you to communicate with my brother's lawyers on the subject of this surrender. I do not know how else to do it; and of course you will understand that I wish to screen my mother's name as much as may be in my power with due regard to honesty. I hope I need not insist on the fact,—for it is a fact,—that nothing will change my purpose as to this. If I cannot have it done through you, I must myself go to Mr. Round. I am, moreover, aware that in accordance with strict justice my brother should have upon me a claim for the proceeds of the estate since the date of our father's death. If he wishes it I will give him such claim, making myself his debtor by any form that may be legal. He must, however, in such case be made to understand that his claim will be against a beggar; but, nevertheless, it may suit his views to have such a claim upon me. I cannot think that, under the circumstances, I should be justified in calling on my mother to surrender her small income; but should you be of a different opinion, it shall be done.

'I write thus to you at once as I think that not a day should be lost. I will trouble you with another line from London, to let you know what is our immediate address.

'Pray believe me to be

'Yours, faithfully and obliged,

'LUCIUS MASON.

'T. Furnival, Esq.,

'Old Square, Lincoln's Inn Fields.'

As soon as he had completed this letter, which was sufficiently good for its purpose, and clearly explained what was the writer's will on the subject of it, he wrote another, which I do not think was equally efficacious. The second was addressed to Miss Furnival, and being a love letter, was not so much within the scope of the writer's peculiar powers.

‘DEAREST SOPHIA,

‘I hardly know how to address you; or what I should tell you or what conceal. Were we together, and was that promise renewed which you once gave me, I should tell you all;—but this I cannot do by letter. My mother’s trial is over, and she is acquitted; but that which I have learned during the trial has made me feel that I am bound to relinquish to my brother-in-law all my title to Orley Farm, and I have already taken the first steps towards doing so. Yes, Sophia, I am now a beggar on the face of the world. I have nothing belonging to me, save those powers of mind and body which God has given me; and I am, moreover, a man oppressed with a terribly heavy load of grief. For some short time I must hide myself with my mother; and then, when I shall have been able to brace my mind to work, I shall go forth and labour in whatever field may be open to me.

‘But before I go, Sophia, I wish to say a word of farewell to you, that I may understand on what terms we part. Of course I make no claim. I am aware that that which I now tell you must be held as giving you a valid excuse for breaking any contract that there may have been between us. But, nevertheless, I have hope. That I love you very dearly I need hardly now say; and I still venture to think that the time may come when I shall again prove myself to be worthy of your hand. If you have ever loved me you cannot cease to do so merely because I am unfortunate; and if you love me still, perhaps you will consent to wait. If you will do so,—if you will say that I am rich in that respect,—I shall go to my banishment not altogether a downcast man.

‘May I say that I am still your own

‘LUCIUS MASON?’

No; he decidedly might not say so. But as the letter was not yet finished when his mother and Mrs. Orme returned, I will not anticipate matters by giving Miss Furnival’s reply.

Mrs. Orme came back that night to Orley Farm, but without the intention of remaining there. Her task was over, and it would be well that she should return to the Cleeve. Her task was over; and as the hour must come in which she should leave the mother in the hands of her son, the present hour would be as good as any.

They again went together to the room which they had shared for the last night or two, and there they parted. They had not been there long when the sound of wheels was heard on the gravel, and Mrs. Orme got up from her seat. ‘There is Peregrine with the carriage,’ said she.

‘And you are going?’ said Lady Mason.

‘If I could do you good, I would stay,’ said Mrs. Orme.

‘No, no; of course you must go. Oh, my darling, oh, my friend, and she threw herself into the other’s arms.

‘Of course I will write to you,’ said Mrs. Orme. ‘I will do so regularly.’

‘May God bless you for ever. But it is needless to ask for blessings on such as you. You are blessed.’

‘And you too;—if you will turn to Him you will be blessed.’

‘Ah me. Well, I can try now. I feel that I can at any rate try.’

‘And none who try ever fail. And now, dear, good-bye.’

‘Good-bye, my angel. But, Mrs. Orme, I have one word I must first say; a message that I must send to him. Tell him this, that never in my life have I loved any man as well as I have loved him and as I do love him. That on my knees I beg his pardon for the wrong I have done him.’

‘But he knows how great has been your goodness to him.’

‘When the time came I was not quite a devil to drag him down with me to utter destruction!’

‘He will always remember what was your conduct then.’

‘But tell him, that though I loved him, and though I loved you with all my heart,—with all my heart, I knew through it all, as I know now, that I was not a fitting friend for him or you. No; do not interrupt me, I always knew it; and though it was so sweet to me to see your faces, I would have kept away; but that he would not have it. I came to him to assist me because he was great and strong, and he took me to his bosom with his kindness, till I destroyed his strength; though his greatness nothing can destroy.’

‘No, no; he does not think that you have injured him.’

‘But tell him what I say; and tell him that a poor bruised, broken creature, who knows at least her own vileness, will pray for him night and morning. And now good-bye. Of my heart towards you I cannot speak.’

‘Good-bye then, and, Lady Mason, never despair. There is always room for hope; and where there is hope there need not be unhappiness.’

Then they parted, and Mrs. Orme went down to her son.

‘Mother, the carriage is here,’ he said.

‘Yes, I heard it. Where is Lucius? Good-bye, Mr. Mason.’

‘God bless you, Mrs. Orme. Believe me I know how good you have been to us.’

As she gave him her hand, she spoke a few words to him. ‘My last request to you, Mr. Mason, is to beg that you will be tender to your mother.’

‘I will do my best, Mrs. Orme.’

‘All her sufferings and your own, have come from her great love for you.’

‘That I know and feel, but had her ambition for me been less it would have been better for both of us.’ And there he stood bare-headed at the door while Peregrine Orme handed his mother into the carriage. Thus Mrs. Orme took her last leave of Orley Farm, and was parted from the woman she had loved with so much truth and befriended with so much loyalty.

Very few words were spoken in the carriage between Peregrine and his mother while they were being taken back through Hamworth to the Cleeve. To Peregrine the whole matter was unintelligible. He knew that the verdict had been in favour of Lady Mason, and yet there had been no signs of joy at Orley Farm, or even of contentment. He had heard also from Lucius, while they had been together for a few minutes, that Orley Farm was to be given up.

‘You’ll let it I suppose,’ Peregrine had asked.

‘It will not be mine to let. It will belong to my brother,’ Lucius had answered. Then Peregrine had asked no further question; nor had Lucius offered any further information.

But his mother, as he knew, was worn out with the work she had done, and at the present moment he felt that the subject was one which would hardly bear questions. So he sat by her side in silence; and before the carriage had reached the Cleeve his mind had turned away from the cares and sorrows of Lady Mason, and was once more at Noningsby. After all, as he said to himself, who could be worse off than he was. He had nothing to hope.

They found Sir Peregrine standing in the hall to receive them, and Mrs. Orme, though she had been absent only three days, could not but perceive the havoc which this trial had made upon him. It was not that the sufferings of those three days had broken him down, but that now, after that short absence, she was able to perceive how great had been upon him the effect of his previous sufferings. He had never held up his head since the day on which Lady Mason had made to him her first confession. Up to that time he had stood erect, and though as he walked his steps had shown that he was no longer young, he had walked with a certain air of strength and manly bearing. Till Lady Mason had come to the Cleeve no one would have said that Sir Peregrine looked as though his energy and life had passed away. But now, as he put his arm round his daughter’s waist, and stooped down to kiss her cheek, he was a worn-out, tottering old man.

During these three days he had lived almost altogether alone, and had been ashamed to show to those around him the intense interest which he felt in the result of the trial. His grandson had on each day breakfasted alone, and had left the house before his grandfather was out of his room; and on each evening he had returned late,—as he now returned with his mother,—and had dined alone. Then he had sat with his grandfather for an hour or two, and had been

constrained to talk over the events of the day without being allowed to ask Sir Peregrine's opinion as to Lady Mason's innocence or to express his own. These three days had been dreadful to Sir Peregrine. He had not left the house, but had crept about from room to room, ever and again taking up some book or paper and putting it down unread, as his mind reverted to the one subject which now for him bore any interest. On the second of these three days a note had been brought to him from his old friend Lord Alston. 'Dear Orme,' the note had run, 'I am not quite happy as I think of the manner in which we parted the other day. If I offended in any degree, I send this as a peacemaker, and beg to shake your hand heartily. Let me have a line from you to say that it is all right between us. Neither you nor I can afford to lose an old friend at our time of life. Yours always, Alston.' But Sir Peregrine had not answered it. Lord Alston's servant had been dismissed with a promise that an answer should be sent, but at the end of the three days it had not yet been written. His mind indeed was still sore towards Lord Alston. The counsel which his old friend had given him was good and true, but it had been neglected, and its very truth and excellence now made the remembrance of it unpalatable. He had, nevertheless, intended to write; but the idea of such exertion from hour to hour had become more distressing to him.

He had of course heard of Lady Mason's acquittal; and indeed tidings of the decision to which the jury had come went through the country very quickly. There is a telegraphic wire for such tidings which has been very long in use, and which, though always used, is as yet but very little understood. How is it that information will spread itself quicker than men can travel, and make its way like water into all parts of the world? It was known all through the country that night that Lady Mason was acquitted; and before the next night it was as well known that she had acknowledged her guilt by giving up the property.

Little could be said as to the trial while Peregrine remained in the room with his mother and his grandfather; but this he had the tact to perceive, and soon left them together. 'I shall see you, mother, up stairs before you go to bed,' he said as he sauntered out.

'But you must not keep her up,' said his grandfather. 'Remember all that she has gone through.' With this injunction he went off, and as he sat alone in his mother's room he tried to come to some resolution as to Noningsby. He knew he had no ground for hope;—no chance, as he would have called it. And if so, would it not be better that he should take himself off? Nevertheless he would go to Noningsby once more. He would not be such a coward but that he would wish her good-bye before he went, and hear the end of it all from her own lips.

When he had left the room Lady Mason's last message was given

to Sir Peregrine. 'Poor soul, poor soul!' he said, as Mrs. Orme began her story. 'Her son knows it all then now.'

'I told him last night,—with her consent; so that he should not go into the court to-day. It would have been very bad, you know, if they had—found her guilty.'

'Yes, yes; very bad—very bad indeed. Poor creature! And so you told him. How did he bear it?'

'On the whole, well. At first he would not believe me.'

'As for me, I could not have done it. I could not have told him.'

'Yes, sir, you would;—you would, if it had been required of you.'

'I think it would have killed me. But a woman can do things for which a man's courage would never be sufficient. And he bore it manfully.'

'He was very stern.'

'Yes;—and he will be stern. Poor soul!—I pity her from my very heart. But he will not desert her; he will do his duty by her.'

'I am sure he will. In that respect he is a good young man.'

'Yes, my dear. He is one of those who seem by nature created to bear adversity. No trouble or sorrow would I think crush him. But had prosperity come to him, it would have made him odious to all around him. You were not present when they met?'

'No—I thought it better to leave them.'

'Yes, yes. And he will give up the place at once.'

'To-morrow he will do so. In that at any rate he has true spirit. To-morrow early they will go to London, and she I suppose will never see Orley Farm again.' And then Mrs. Orme gave Sir Peregrine that last message.—'I tell you everything as she told me.' Mrs. Orme said, seeing how deeply he was affected. 'Perhaps I am wrong.'

'No, no, no,' he said.

'Coming at such a moment, her words seemed to be almost sacred.'

'They are sacred. They shall be sacred. Poor soul, poor soul!'

'She did a great crime.'

'Yes, yes.'

'But if a crime can be forgiven,—can be excused on account of its motives——'

'It cannot, my dear. Nothing can be forgiven on that ground.'

'No; we know that; we all feel sure of that. But yet how can one help loving her? For myself, I shall love her always.'

'And I also love her.' And then the old man made his confession. 'I loved her well;—better than I had ever thought to love any one again, but you and Perry. I loved her very dearly, and felt that I should have been proud to have called her my wife. How beautiful she was in her sorrow, when we thought that her life had been pure and good!'

‘And it had been good,—for many years past.’

‘No; for the stolen property was still there. But yet how graceful she was, and how well her sorrows sat upon her! What might she not have done had the world used her more kindly, and not sent in her way that sore temptation! She was a woman for a man to have loved to madness.’

‘And yet how little can she have known of love!’

‘I loved her.’ And as the old man said so he rose to his feet with some show of his old energy. ‘I loved her,—with all my heart! It is foolish for an old man so to say; but I did love her; nay, I love her still. But that I knew that it would be wrong,—for your sake, and for Perry’s——’ And then he stopped himself, as though he would fain hear what she might say to him.

‘Yes; it is all over now,’ she said in the softest, sweetest, lowest voice. She knew that she was breaking down a last hope, but she knew also that that hope was vain. And then there was silence in the room for some ten minutes’ space.

‘It is all over,’ he then said, repeating her last words.

‘But you have us still,—Perry and me. Can any one love you better than we do?’ And she got up and went over to him and stood by him, and leaned upon him.

‘Edith, my love, since you came to my house there has been an angel in it watching over me. I shall know that always; and when I turn my face to the wall, as I soon shall, that shall be my last earthly thought.’ And so in tears they parted for that night. But the sorrow that was bringing him to his grave came from the love of which he had spoken. It is seldom that a young man may die from a broken heart; but if an old man have a heart still left to him, it is more fragile.

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